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In His Steps

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IN HIS STEPS:

A BOOK

FOR YOUNG CHRISTIANS SETTING OUT TO FOLLOW CHRIST.

BY

J. R. MILLER,

AUTHOR OF "WEEK-DAY RELIGION," "HOME-MAKING," ETC.

PHILADELPHIA:

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TO THE

YOUNG CHRISTIANS

OF THE

THREE CONGREGATIONS WHICH HE HAS BEEN PERMITTED TO SERVE AS PASTOR—

THE BETHANY CHURCH, PHILADELPHIA,

THE BROADWAY CHURCH, ROCK ISLAND, ILLINOIS,

AND

THE HOLLOND MEMORIAL CHURCH, PHILADELPHIA—

THIS LITTLE BOOK

Is Affectionately Dedicated

BY THEIR

FAITHFUL FRIEND.

WHY THIS BOOK IS WRITTEN.

MANY young Christians, as they begin their new life, are perplexed to know what they should do, what their new duties are, what it is to live a Christian life, where and how to get the help they need to meet their new responsibilities. This little book has been prepared in the hope that to some of this class it may prove helpful. The writer has no other desire so strong as that he may in these plain, simple chapters be permitted to "lend a hand" to some younger Christians who desire to reach the best possible things in their Christian life, but who do not know just how to begin nor what to strive to be and to do.

There are many pastors who desire a little book suitable to put into the hands of those who enter the Church by public confession. There are

Sabbath-school teachers, also, who desire a book that they can give to the young Christians in their classes to guide their early steps.

The writer is not without the hope that this book may prove suitable and useful for these purposes; so it is sent out with the prayer that the Master may use it to help some of his followers to live more earnestly, beautifully and usefully.

J. R. M.

PHILADELPHIA.

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IN HIS STEPS.

I.

BEGINNING WELL: INTRODUCTORY.

IT is impossible to exaggerate the importance of a good beginning in any course of life. Many people spend the latter half of their years in correcting the errors of the earlier half, and by the time they are ready to live the end has come. A good beginning at once turns all the energies into the right channels. No golden years need then be wasted in unlearning false lessons, in revising unwise or impracticable plans or in retracing one's steps. Many a career of brilliant possibilities is marred by a wrong beginning. There are mistakes of early life which men never get over. A bad foundation has caused the wreck of many a noble building. Inadequate preparation for a business or a calling leads, at the best, to impaired

success, and most frequently results, in the end, in utter failure.

These principles apply in Christian life. It is of the utmost importance that we start well. Many Christians walk in doubt and shadow all their days. never entering into rich joy and peace because at the beginning they failed to understand or to realize the blessedness of the privileges to which, as children of God, they are entitled. Many others never attain anything noble and beautiful in Christian life and character because at the beginning they did not wholly disentangle themselves from their old life and fully consecrate themselves to Christ. A good beginning, therefore, involves two things —clearness and definiteness of aim, with intelligent views of the nature and meaning of the Christian life; and completeness of consecration.

Many men fail in life because they have no settled purpose, no well-defined plan. They have no goal set before them which with all their energies they strive to reach. There is in their mind no clear and distinct idea toward which they struggle. They merely drift on the current, and are borne by it whithersoever it flows. They are not masters in life, but poor slaves. They conquer

nothing, but are the mere creatures of circumstance. Such lives, however, are unworthy of intelligent beings endowed with immortal powers, and they never reach any high degree of nobleness or success.

No sculptor touches the marble until he has in his mind a definite conception of his work as it will appear when it has been finished. He sees a vision before him of a very lovely form, and then sets to work to fashion the vision in the stone. No builder begins to erect a house until a complete plan embracing every detail has been adopted. Before he strikes a stroke he knows precisely what the finished structure will be. No one would cut into a web of rich and costly cloth until he had before him the pattern of the garment he would make. In all work on material things men have definite aims before they begin their work, and know precisely what they intend to produce.

But in life itself and living, in character-building, in destiny-shaping, many fail to exercise such wisdom. Multitudes never give one earnest thought to such questions as these: "What is my life? For what purpose is it entrusted to me? What ought I

to do with it? What should be the great aim of my existence? What should I strive to be and to do?" Thousands live aimlessly, having no true sense of the responsibility of living, never forming an earnest, resolute purpose to rise to any noble height or to achieve any worthy thing. An immortal life should have its aim ever shining before it bright and clear as a star in the heavens. To grow up as a plant—without thought or purpose—is well enough for a plant, and God clothes it and shapes it into marvelous beauty; but men with undying souls and measureless possibilities should have a purpose worthy of their immortality, and should strive with heroic energy to attain it.

No one begins well in life who has not settled in his own mind what, by God's help, he will strive to do with his life.

In entering the Christian life there should be a clear aim. We should know definitely what this new life is which we have now to live. With but vague ideas of the meaning of a Christian life—its ideal, its requirements, its privileges, the duties which belong to it—no one can begin well. All is vague and misty, and while it is so we cannot

put any purpose or energy into our life. We need to understand the new relations into which we come as children of God, in order that we may realize the privileges of our position. We need to have a clear conception of the final aim of all Christian attainment and aspiration, in order that we may strive toward it. We need to know what is required of a Christian toward his God and toward his fellow-men, in order that we may faithfully and intelligently perform all our duties. We need to know the conditions of Christian life —its needs, its dangers—in order that we may avail ourselves of the necessary helps provided for us. Thus a clear and intelligent aim is essential in beginning well as a Christian.

"Chisel in hand stood a sculptor-boy
With his marble block before him,
And his face lit up with a smile of joy
As an angel-dream passed o'er him.
He carved the dream on that shapeless stone
With many a sharp incision;
With heaven's own light the sculpture shone:
He had caught that angel-vision.

"Sculptors of life are we as we stand,
With our souls uncarved before us,

Waiting the hour when, at God's command,
Our life-dream shall pass o'er us.
If we carve it then on the yielding stone
With many a sharp incision,
Its heavenly beauty shall be our own;
Our lives, that angel-vision."

Besides the clear aim, the other essential thing in beginning well is the devotion and consecration of ourselves to the new life we have chosen. A good ideal is not enough. One may aim an arrow with perfect accuracy, but the bow must also be drawn and the cord let fly if the arrow is to reach the mark. A vision in the brain is not enough for the sculptor: he must hew and chisel the marble into the form of his vision. The architect's plan is only a picture, and there must be toil and cost until the building stands complete in its noble beauty.

A good aim is not all of a Christian life. It is nothing more than an empty dream unless it be wrought out in Godlike character and Christ-like ministry. Every earnest Christian looks much at the glorious Master, and, as he looks, visions of wondrous beauty fill his soul—glimpses of the loveliness of Christ; and he must then seek

with patient yet intense purpose to reproduce these heavenly visions in his own life.

Many people have sublimest aspirations and wishes—and even form their aspirations and wishes into intentions and resolves—who yet never take a step toward realizing them. Mere knowing what it is to be a Christian makes no one a Christian; many perish with the glorious ideal shining full and clear before their eyes. Merely seeing the beauty of Christ, as it is held before us for our copying, will never fashion us into that beauty. Our knowledge must be wrought into life. The image our souls see must be fashioned into character. Our good intentions must take form in daily deeds. Knowing God's will, we must do it with willing heart and diligent hand.

"Make my mortal dreams come true
With the work I fain would do;
Clothe with life the weak intent:
Let me be the thing I meant;
Let me find in thy employ
Peace that dearer is than joy;
Out of self to love be led,
And to heaven acclimated,
Until all things sweet and good
Seem my natural habitude."

II.

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE: THE IDEAL.

"Far better in its place the lowliest bird
Should sing aright to Him the lowliest song
Than that a seraph strayed should take the word
And sing his glory wrong."

WHAT is it to be a Christian? What is that change which, wrought in a natural man, makes him a Christian man? What are a Christian's new relations to God and to his fellow-men? What is Christian character? How should a Christian live? What is the pattern on which his life should be fashioned? If we would make our Christian lives what they ought to be, we must find plain, clear answers to these questions.

A Christian is one who believes on Christ. He has entrusted his whole life, with its sin, its guilt, its ruin, its need, its security for eternity, its redemption, cleansing and transformation, to the hands of the mighty Saviour, the strong Son of God.

A Christian is therefore a saved one, a redeemed one —saved, redeemed, by Christ. He is no longer guilty and condemned: he is acquitted, justified, restored to such relations before God that he is as if he had never sinned, so fully are his sins put away. He is God's lost and wandering child brought home, received, reconciled, restored to all a child's privileges.

But this is not all; it is not merely a change of relations. Those who believe on Christ are born again, the Scripture says—born from above, born of God; that is, there is a new, a divine, life in the regenerated soul. Christ speaks of it as a well of water in the believer springing up into everlasting life. The result is shown in new affections, new desires, new hopes, new aims. Forgiveness of sins is not enough. A man's lies and dishonesties may be forgiven; but if that is all, he is still a liar and dishonest. God's forgiveness regenerates. A Christian life is really the setting up of the kingdom of God in a human heart.

A child was troubled at the thought that heaven was so far away, and was perplexed to know how he could ever get up to that bright home. His

mother explained to him that heaven must first come down to him—must first enter his heart. A Christian is one into whose heart the spirit of heaven has entered. The new life is like that they live in heaven. We are taught to pray, "Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven." The one place in all the earth in which it most concerns each Christian to see that God's will is done as it is in heaven is in his own individual heart.

If we are truly born again, the life of heaven has really begun within us. It may be very feeble in its beginning, like one little seed only, planted in a garden; but the one seed is from heaven, and the new life in us has truly begun. "That which is born of the Spirit," said the Master, "is spirit." It is the life of the Spirit in a human soul. Paul put this truth in very striking way when he said, "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Our Lord said a Christian is "a branch" of the true Vine. This suggests what Christian life and character should be before the world. Every true Christian is a new incarnation. Christ showed the world in his own person the life of the invisible God. No human eye ever saw God in

his glory; no one could ever have seen him had not Christ come down and in a plain, simple and real human life which men could see and understand lived out the divine life which in its glory men could neither see nor understand. He interpreted the invisible things of God in act and phrase which the common people could read. He said, when he was asked about God, "Look at me and see God. I and my Father are one. He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."

In like manner, in his own small measure, every one truly a Christian is an incarnation of God, and should be able in humility to say, "Look at me, and you will see a dim but faithful representation of God." This puts a very solemn responsibility on every Christian. He represents God in this world, and is to live in such a way that from his life men shall learn the truth about God. If Christ lives in us, men must see Christ in our faces and hear him in our words and learn of him in our acts.

The ideal of Christian life is therefore the likeness of Christ. That is the pattern shown in the mount after which we are to strive to fashion our life.

As we study Christ in the Gospels there rises up before us the vision of his matchless beauty. We go over the chapters, and we find one fragment of his loveliness here and another there; and as we read the story through to the end beauty after beauty appears, until at length we see a full vision of the Christ which, though imperfect by reason of the imperfectness of our nature, yet truly represents to us the image of our blessed Redeemer. This is the pattern we are to follow in fashioning our lives. This is the vision we are to seek to carve into reality in our own character. All acts we are to bring to the example of Christ, testing each one by that infallible standard. The gospel should be studied by the young Christian as a builder studies the architect's drawings, that every minutest detail may be exactly reproduced so far as in a faulty and sinful human life the character and conduct of the faultless and sinless Jesus can be reproduced. The perfect Pattern is ever to be held before us for imitation, and as we look at it glowing in all its marvelous beauty, yet far above us and beyond our present reach, we are to comfort ourselves and inspire our hearts to the noblest efforts and highest attainments by the thought,

"That is what some time I am going to be." And however slow may be our progress toward that perfect ideal; however sore the struggles with weakness and sin; however often we fail,—we are never to lose sight of the distant goal nor cease to strive and press toward the mark. Some day, if we are faithful to the end and faint not, we shall emerge out of all failure and struggle, and, seeing Jesus as he is, shall be fully transformed into his blessed image.

Such is the aim of the Christian life. "We shall be like Him"—that is the final destiny of every redeemed life. This should be inspiration enough to arouse in the dullest soul every sluggish hope and every slumbering energy, and to impel to the highest effort and the most heroic struggle. This assurance should perpetually shine like a bright star beyond the fields of toil and battle, forbidding discouragement in any temporary failure or defeat and cheering all faintness and weariness into buoyant strength and enthusiasm.

This goal of blessedness is not to be reached at one bound: it is the work of long and painful years, and the progress is slow and the transformation gradual and almost imperceptible.

"Heaven is not gained by a single bound,
But we build the ladder by which we rise
From the lowly earth to the vaulted skies,
And we mount to its summit round by round."

It will help us, in striving after the perfected beauty, to remember that we can best attain it by carving each moment's line with care. God gives us life by days and hours, not by months and years. The way to have his purpose for us fulfilled in us is to fill each minute with simple faithfulness. Doing God's will for each moment not only lights the path for the next, but prepares us for its responsibility. Charles Kingsley said, "Do to-day's duty, fight to-day's temptation, and do not weaken or distract yourself by looking forward to things which you cannot see, and could not understand if you saw them."

Character is a mosaic in which each day has its little stone to set; we need but to look well to the days as they come, and to print on each its record of beauty, and the whole will be beautiful in the end. This living simply by the day is one of the royal secrets of a beautiful life which every young Christian should learn. The following lines by Susan Coolidge are full of suggestions on this point:

"Every day is a fresh beginning,
Every morn is the world made new:
You who are weary of sorrow and sinning,
Here is a beautiful hope for you—
A hope for me, and a hope for you.

"All the past things are past and over;
The tasks are done and the tears are shed:
Yesterday's errors let yesterday cover;
Yesterday's wounds, which smarted and bled,
Are healed with the healing which night has shed.

"Yesterday now is a part of Forever—
Bound up in a sheaf, which God holds tight,
With glad days and sad days and bad days which never
Shall visit us more with their bloom and their blight,
Their fullness of sunshine or sorrowful night.

"Let them go, since we cannot relive them—
Cannot undo and cannot atone;
God in his mercy receive, forgive them!
Only the new days are our own:
To-day is ours, and to-day alone.

"Here are the skies all burnished brightly,
Here is the spent earth all reborn,
Here are the tired limbs springing lightly
To face the sun and share with the morn
In the chrism of dew and the cool of dawn.

"Every day is a fresh beginning;
Listen, my soul, to the glad refrain,
And, spite of old sorrow, and older sinning,
And puzzles forecasted, and possible pain,
Take heart with the day, and begin again."

A life thus lived, each day made beautiful with the beauty of holiness and of usefulness, will in the end give a record of duty well done, of work completed, of blessings left behind at each step, and a character transfigured by the indwelling divine Spirit and the outworking of love until it shines in the full likeness of Christ himself.

III.

LIVING FOR GOD: CONSECRATION.

IT is not enough to cut loose from the old life: the young Christian must enter the new life. Leaving the service of one master, he must enlist in that of another. Withdrawing his heart's affections from one class of objects, he must fix them upon another class. Ceasing to do evil, he must also learn to do well. No longer a servant of sin, he must become a servant of righteousness. Mere repentance is not enough; giving up one's wicked ways is but half of conversion: there must also be a devotement of the life to Christ. The heart cannot be left empty.

"When St. Boniface had hewn down the sacred oak worshiped by the savages in the tangled forests of Germany, he did not stop with destroying it, but when it was felled built out of its fallen and splintered fragments the chapel of St. Peter, and in the room of the worship of Thor the Thunderer

left the worship of Christ the Crucified. 'To replace is to conquer;' and the theology of the forests fled back abashed before the theology of the cross." When we break with the world, we must straightway bow before Christ; indeed, we can be freed from the dominion of the old master only by the coming into our hearts of the new. Christ must be Deliverer as well as Lord. The only way we can turn from sin is by turning to Christ. He then becomes, first, Deliverer and Saviour; afterward, King and Lord. As such he must be accepted, and the whole allegiance of the life should instantly be transferred to him. This surrender should be complete and entire. Every power of body and soul should be carried over into the service of the new master, and every energy dedicated to him.

This is conversion; it is going over to Christ fully, wholly, freely and for ever. It is not merely attaching ourselves to the Church: it is attaching ourselves to Christ. It is not merely entering upon a good moral life—pure, honest, clean; not merely engaging in active Christian work: it is the acceptance of Christ, first as a personal Saviour, then as a personal Lord. It is coming to Christ himself,

believing on him, following him, loving him, obeying him.

It is important that the young Christian shall understand this, and that his devotion to his Lord shall be real and complete. No man can serve two masters. It will not do to try a divided allegiance. True consecration carries all over to Christ.

For one thing, this means holiness: "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God." The life that belongs to Christ must be kept from sin. The hands that are held up in prayer and that take the sacramental emblems must not touch any unclean thing. The lips that speak to God and sing his praise and pronounce his name must not be stained by sinful or bitter words. The heart which is the dwelling-place of the Holy Ghost must not open to any thought or affection that would defile God's temple. The feet that Christ's pierced hands have washed must not walk in any of sin's unhallowed paths. A consecrated life must be holy.

Unholiness is very subtle. It creeps in when we are not aware. It begins in the heart. At first it is but a thought, or a moment's imagining, or a passing emotion, or a desire. Hence the heart

should be kept with unremitting diligence. Only pure and good thoughts should be entertained. It is in the thoughts that all life begins. All acts are thoughts first. Our thoughts build up our character as the coral-insects build up the great reefs. The Bible tells us that as a man thinketh in his heart so is he. Some one has written: "Beautiful thoughts make a beautiful soul, and a beautiful soul makes a beautiful face." If we are to keep ourselves unspotted from the world as we pass through its foul streets, we must see to it that no unholy thing is for a moment tolerated in our hearts. A crime stains one's name before the world, but a sinful thought or wish stains the soul in God's eyes and grieves the divine Spirit within us.

But the keeping of the life unspotted is not the whole of living for God: there must be service also. When young Christians are received into the Church, they profess to dedicate themselves and all they have—time, talents, money, every power, body, soul and spirit—to the service of Christ for ever. This means that they will no longer claim mastership over themselves; that henceforth they are Christ's servants; that they will live for Christ only each day; that they will listen

at each step for his command and promptly obey it; that they will devote all their possessions to him, using them for him and at his bidding; and that they will employ their talents and influence to advance his kingdom.

Here is the point at which, for many young Christians, perplexity begins. They are sincere and earnest in their desire to live for Christ and to make their consecration sincere and full, yet they do not know how to do it. It seems to them, in the warm glow of their first love, that they are living for Christ only while engaged in religious exercises—praying, singing praise, reading the Bible, visiting the sick or speaking to others about their souls. Ordinary secular duties seem to them out of harmony with the spirit of consecration.

This is a great mistake. Daily duty in the common relations of life is as much part of a true consecration as are praying and reading the Bible and attending church-services. If the heart be given to Christ, the whole life is holy. We do not live two lives—one religious and one secular—after we become Christians. We are always to do God's will, and it is as much his will that we

should be diligent in business as that we should be fervent in spirit.

> "The trivial round, the common task,
> Would furnish all we ought to ask—
> Room to deny ourselves, a road
> To bring us daily nearer God."

When young persons yet in school become Christians, they are not to drop their secular studies and read the Bible all the time: they are to go on with their lessons—only with new motives, for Christ now—faithfully using every moment, diligently striving to get the greatest possible benefit and improvement from their education to fit them for the life and work before them. When religion makes a pupil less diligent, less studious, less earnest, there is something wrong. When a young man in a trade or business gives himself to Christ, unless his occupation is sinful or he is called to the ministry of the gospel, he is to continue in it, carrying his Christian principles into it and doing business now for Christ.

So in all cases. Secular work is not unholy. All duty is sacred in God's sight. The hands of Jesus swung the axe and pushed the plane, and he pleased

the Father then just as well as when he was praying and reading the Scriptures. Paul's hands sewed upon tents, and he was just as near to God then as when he was preaching in the synagogue. Of course the motive of life is changed when we truly belong to Christ. Self comes down from the throne and we do everything for the Master: "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." We train our powers to greater efficiency that we may be more useful in his work. We live carefully that in the smallest things we may honor him. We seek increased influence that we may do more to bless the world and advance the glory of Christ's name. For the world is reading our lives, and it reads no other Bible; and we must make sure that our daily actions spell out a true gospel, so that no one who sees us may ever get a wrong thought of Christ or a wrong sense of his religion from us. None of us understand one half the blessing to others and the influence for religion there is in simply *being good.* We struggle to be active and to do many things. We run everywhere to work for Christ. We think that unless we are always doing something, or talking to somebody, or holding a meet-

ing somewhere, or visiting the poor or the sick, we are not useful. We make a mistake. There is no other such power for real usefulness and helpfulness, no other such glory for God, as in simple goodness. Holy life itself is highest service.

Hence there should be in every young Christian the most conscientious watchfulness over the early growths of spirituality in his own heart. These growths are tender and easily destroyed, like the young plants which the gardener keeps in his conservatory through the winter and cool spring days. The whole matter of heart-culture requires the utmost diligence. All life, business and social as well as religious, must be made to contribute to it. We should form our friendships and choose our amusements with reference to their effect on our heart-life. Some one has given this true test, whose application should be wide as life itself: "Whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your view of God or takes off the relish of spiritual things—in short, whatever increases the authority of your body over your mind—that is *sin to you*, however innocent it may be in itself."

A life so regulated, so watched, so ruled by con-

science and by the word and Spirit of God, will grow into a living power of real holiness the value of whose ministry will be incalculable in its silent pervasive influence.

> "Birds, by being glad, their Maker bless;
> By simply shining, sun and star;
> And we, whose law is love, serve less
> By what we do than what we are."

There is still another part of all true consecration: besides living a pure and good life, and besides doing all our daily work for Christ, we should also embrace every opportunity of doing good to others in Christ's name and for his sake. There are needy and suffering ones all about us, and we are to do Christ's errands to these, performing for them the ministries of kindness and mercy which he would render if he were here in person. There are weak and fainting ones about us who find life hard and who need sympathy and help. To all these we have errands of love: we should share their burdens and put strong sustaining arms about them in their weakness. A life for Christ must always be a life of love, of usefulness and of helpfulness. No true Christian lives for

himself. We have our model in Him who came "not to be ministered unto, but to minister." We need not wait for great opportunities: these come but rarely; the common days are full of opportunities for little kindnesses and thoughtfulnesses and unselfishnesses, and in order to write bright records for ourselves we have only to seize these and put out our hands to render the ministries to which God thus invites and calls us. Doing the thing that Christ himself would do if he were just in our place—that is the rule for Christian living.

Thus consecration becomes very real. It is just living for God, day by day, hour by hour. It is nothing strained or unnatural; it does not wrench us out of our place nor disturb our relationships unless they are sinful: it is the simple living out in true devotion to Christ, in unquestioning obedience and in quiet faithfulness, the life he gives, in whatever sphere our lot may be cast.

IV.

MEETING TEMPTATION: CONFLICT.

THE experience of temptation is universal. Every life must grow up amid unfriendly and opposing influences—some of them subtle and insidious like miasma in the air, some of them fierce and wild like the blast of storm or the rush of battle. Much is said in exhortation about the solemn nature of death; yet really it is not half so perilous a thing to die as it is to live. No child of God was ever lost, or even harmed, in the experience of dying:

> "The grave itself is but a covered bridge
> Leading from light to light through a brief darkness."

But *life* is full of peril. To live truly we must battle day by day. Satan is no mediæval myth, but an actual foe, powerful, cunning, treacherous, terrible. Danger lurks in every shadow.

The question in life is not how to escape tempta-

tion, but how to pass through it so as not to be harmed by it. Christ's way of helping us is not by keeping us out of the conflicts. All the best things in life — the only things worth grasping — lie beyond the fields of struggle, and we can get them only by overcoming. It would be no kindness to us were God to withdraw us into some sheltered spot whenever there is danger, or if he were to fight our battles for us, thus freeing us from all necessity to struggle.

"He who hath never a conflict hath never a victor's palm,
And only the toilers know the sweetness of rest and calm."

We must meet temptation, and we must make up our minds to fight. Not to fight is to lose all. And there is really no need to yield. The weakest child may move unharmed through the sorest strifes. It is possible to meet the strongest temptations and not be hurt by them. It has been done. Men have met the fiercest enemies, the most unrelenting oppositions, passing through the hottest flames, and have come out, like the Hebrew children from the king's furnace, without even the smell of fire on their garments. Whatever may be said of the weakness of human nature unhelped and unsus-

tained, there still is no need for any trembling soul to faint in the strife or to fall in its fury. There is a divine Helper who himself went into the thickest of the strife and passed through it unharmed. He was "tempted in all points, like as we are, yet without sin"—that is, victoriously; and because he was thus victorious he is able not only to understand human struggles and to sympathize with every one who is tempted, but also to give "grace to help in time of need." We have the assurance that the faithful God will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able, but will with the temptation make the way of escape that we may be able to endure it.

There is, therefore, a way of so living in this world as to miss harm from even the fiercest temptations—to pass through them and not be touched by them. There is even a way of so meeting temptations as to get benefit and blessing from them. An apostle said, "Count it all joy when ye fall into manifold temptations: knowing that the proof of your faith worketh patience;" "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he hath been approved he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord promised to them that love him."

Rightly meeting and victoriously resisting puts new fibre into the soul. The Indians say that when a warrior kills a foe the spirit of the vanquished enemy enters the victor's heart and adds to his own strength. This is true in spiritual warfare. We grow stronger through our struggles and victories. Each lust conquered, each evil subdued, adds to the strength of our soul.

The question, then, is how to meet temptation so as to overcome, and thus win the blessing there is in it. We must remember, first of all, that we are not able in ourselves successfully to fight our battles. If we think we are, and go forth in our own name and strength, we shall fail. Life is too large, and its struggles and conflicts are too sore, for the strongest human power unaided. We must settle it once for all that we can conquer only in the name and by the help of the strong Son of God. We may come off the field more than conquerors, but only through Him that loved us. We can pass safely through all the fierce dangers of this world and be kept unspotted amid its sin and foulness, but only if we have with us Him who is able to guard us from stumbling and set us before the presence

of his glory without blemish in exceeding joy. Self-confidence in times of temptation is fatal folly.

Then we must be sure that the temptation we are meeting really lies in the path of our duty—that God calls us to meet it. We pray each morning, "Lead us not into temptation;" we must, then, be sure that we are following our Father's leading when we enter any way of temptation. Only when the temptation comes in the path over which the divine Guide takes us have we the assurance of protection in it. There are temptations the only way of escape from which is *avoidance.* We have no right to meet them.

Lord Macaulay tells us that at the siege of Naumur, while the conflict was raging, William, prince of Orange, who was giving his orders under a shower of bullets, saw with surprise and anger among his staff-officers Michael Godfrey, the deputy governor of the Bank of England. He had come to the king's headquarters on business, and was curious to see real war.

"Mr. Godfrey," said King William, "you ought not to run these hazards. You are not a soldier; you can be of no use to us here."

"Sir," answered Godfrey, "I run no more risk than Your Majesty."

"Not so," said William. "I am where it is my duty to be, and I may without presumption commit my life to God's keeping; but you—"

Before the sentence was finished a cannon-ball laid Godfrey dead at the king's feet.

The king's words were true, and the truth is just as applicable to temptations and spiritual dangers as to the perils of war. When duty calls us into any place, we are safe: God will protect us; but otherwise we venture without any promise of shelter. We must face danger only when God and duty unmistakably lead.

Then, when we find ourselves in the presence of temptation, we must not forget that we have something ourselves to do in getting the victory. Men and devils may tempt us, but men and devils cannot force us to yield. We are sovereigns in our choices while the right and the wrong stand before us. Other wills may seek to influence us—may plead, entreat, persuade—but they cannot compel. We cannot avoid being tempted, but we ought to avoid yielding to temptation. Luther used to say, "We cannot keep the birds from

flying around our heads, but we can prevent them building their nests in our hair." So we cannot keep temptations away from our ears nor prevent them whispering their seductive words close by us, but we can hinder them making their nests in our hearts. We are not passive in this matter. We must not expect God to fasten the door and all the time hold his hand upon the lock. The shutting and opening of the door is our part of the responsibility. Even God himself will never come into our heart unless we voluntarily open it to him. He stands without and knocks, waiting with all his wealth of love and all his power to bless until we bid him welcome. We with our frail weakness can keep even Omnipotence outside. And, as divine grace cannot enter to do us good unless we open, neither can satanic evil enter to work ruin in our souls. Thus the final responsibility is with ourselves. Our duty, therefore, in temptation is unwavering resistance—an unreversible "No!" to every solicitation to sin. If we settle this point, we have learned one of the greatest lessons in spiritual warfare—"having done all, to stand."

Besides this, nothing more is needed but faith

and prayer. When the temptation comes in the path of duty, and when we resist it with unflinching determination, we may with simple confidence commit our safety to God. No evil can ever harm us if we cleave unfalteringly to Christ: "He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways." Still better: "The Lord is thy Keeper."

"I have known a timid traveler," says one, "whose route lay across the higher Alps, on a path that, no broader than a mule's foothold, skirted a dizzy precipice, where we saw the foaming river, far below, diminished to a silver thread, find it safest to shut his eyes, nor attempt to guide the course or touch the bridle where a touch were fatal, throwing the steed and rider over, to bound from shelf to shelf and be dashed to pieces in the valley below. And there are times and circumstances when to be saved from falling . . . the believer must, if we may say so, shut his eyes, and, committing his way to God, let the bridle lie on the neck of Providence, and walk, not by sight, but faith. . . . When we are walking in darkness and have no light, there is nothing for it but to trust in the Lord and stay ourselves on God."

There come times in every life when this is just the picture for us—when all we can do is to shut our eyes and let God lead us through the peril. Indeed, in all hours of darkness and danger, this is our privilege and our duty; and if we thus commit our way to God, he will bring us safely through the last peril and the last struggle into the light and joy of victory on the heavenly plains.

Then it will be seen that it has been no misfortune that we have had to fight sore battles on the earth. Old war-veterans are not ashamed of their scars: these are marks of honor; they tell of wounds received in battling for their country. In heaven the soldier of Christ will not be ashamed of the scars he has gotten in his warfare for his Lord on the earth; his crown will be all the brighter for them. They will shine as the King's medals, decorations of honor—"the marks of the Lord Jesus."

When an army marches home from a victorious field, it is not the bright, clean, untorn flag that is most wildly cheered, but the flag that is pierced, riddled and torn by the shot and shell of many a battle. So in the home-coming in glory it will not be the man who bears fewest marks of suffering

and struggle and the fewest scars of wounds received in Christ's service who will be welcomed with the greatest joy, but the man who bears the marks of the sorest conflicts and the greatest sufferings for the honor of his Lord and for his kingdom.

V.

WORKING FOR CHRIST: SERVICE.

"Be thy best thoughts to work divine addressed;
Do something—do it soon—with all thy might:
An angel's wings would droop if long at rest,
And God himself, inactive, were no longer blest."

EVERY truly-consecrated life has been made over to Christ with all its powers. Faith implies full surrender: "Ye are not your own;" "Ye are Christ's." Christ owns us first by right of creation, then by right of purchase; and we acknowledge his ownership and all that it includes when we accept him as our Saviour and Lord. We voluntarily and heartily give ourselves to him. The first question, therefore, of the new-believing heart is, "What shall I do, Lord?" We want to begin to work for our new Master. We belong to him; we are his slaves: that is the word St. Paul used so much, and with such a thrill of joy as he thought of the honor it denoted.

He was Christ's slave: "Whose I am, and whom I serve," was his working creed. We belong absolutely to Christ; he is our only Master. We are no longer our own in any sense, and have no right to our own way. "Thy will, not mine," is henceforth the only true law of life for us. We are to wait at each step for Christ's bidding. Our very thoughts must be brought into captivity to him.

This ownership covers and embraces all life. We are to live for Christ while at our commonest daily work, pleasing and honoring him in everything we do. A heart of love for Christ makes all work holy service, and even "drudgery divine." It makes the sweeping of a room, the ploughing of a field, the sawing of a board, the making of a garment, the selling of a piece of goods, the minding of a baby, all actions as fine as the ministry of angels.

One way of working for Christ, therefore, is to be diligent in the doing of life's common daily tasks. The true giving of ourselves to God exalts all of life into divine honor and sacredness. Nothing is trivial or indifferent which it is our duty to do. We are never to neglect any work,

however secular it may seem, in order to do something else which appears to be more religious. It is not a common fault, but there are some people who would be better Christians if they paid more heed to their own daily business and attended fewer meetings and did less "religious gossiping." Ruskin says, "Neither days nor lives can be made holy by doing nothing in them. The best prayer at the beginning of a day is that we may not lose its moments; and the best grace before meat, the consciousness that we have justly earned our dinner."

But, besides this living of the whole life for Christ, there is specific work for him in which every Christian has a part to perform. There are lost souls all about us, and every one who is saved should do something toward saving others. This is not alone the work of ordained preachers: "Let him that heareth say, Come." The first thought of a truly saved person is of some friend or friends who are still in peril, and the first impulse of a renewed heart is to try to bring these lost ones to the Saviour. The cause of Christ in this world needs assistance in many ways, and it is the will of the Master that this cause should be ad-

vanced, not by the ministry of angels, not by Christ himself immediately and directly, but by his people —those whom he has redeemed and saved. The story of salvation must be told by lips that have first uttered the cry for mercy. The lost must be won by the love of hearts that have first been broken in penitence. The divine blessing of salvation must be carried in earthen vessels to the perishing.

Every Christian has something to do for Christ in this world. No one can be exempted. The fullest hands must make room for some little part of the Master's work. Even the child that loves Christ may at least carry a cup of the water of life to some thirsty soul.

Every Christian should be deeply imbued with the missionary spirit. A portion of the responsibility for carrying the news of salvation to every creature rests on each follower of Christ. In these days of missionary activity there is no one who cannot do something to help send the gospel to heathen lands. Every young Christian should consider himself, from the moment of his consecration to Christ, a debtor to all men, near and far, who are not yet saved, and in prayer and

work and gift he should seek to pay that debt to the last atom of his ability.

There is also very much of sorrow and suffering in this world, and every Christian should do all in his power to comfort the sorrow and alleviate the suffering. Here, as in all things, Christ himself is our example and his life is our pattern. We represent him in this world. He has gone away to heaven, but he has left his people here to carry on his work.

Christ's early life was full of kindness and gentleness. There were a great many people about him who were troubled and unhappy. Some of them were sick, some were blind, some were lame, some were leprous, some had sorrow in one form or another. To all of these Jesus showed the sweetest spirit of kindness. He pitied them. He was touched with compassion as he saw their sufferings. He was deeply interested in every case. He gave real and true sympathy. Nor did he stop with tender emotion and kindly words: he put forth his power and helped the sufferers in whatever way they most needed help. The sick he healed; the troubled he comforted in such a manner that they never forgot his gracious love.

We must try to repeat this part of Christ's ministry. There are troubled ones about us all the time—those who are sick or poor or carrying some heart-burden of care or grief; those who have been crushed by adversity or trodden down in the dust of failure and defeat; those who are suffering from wrong or injustice. We do not know half the sorrows that the people whom we meet every day are enduring. Here is a wide field for most Christlike and most helpful ministry. What we need for it is a spirit of sympathy and kindness that shall never fail. We may not be able to do much to relieve those who are troubled: we certainly cannot work miracles as Christ did; but we may have a heart of love which shall manifest itself toward every one in a spirit of patient gentleness and kindly thoughtfulness. It does a great deal of good just really to care for people who are in trouble and to show them that we care for them—to be truly interested in them and willing to try to help them. Sincere sympathy is ofttimes better than money. People in distress generally need a friend more than they need gift or miracle God sends no angels to earth whose ministry

leaves more benedictions of joy, of help, of inspiration, of uplifting, of restoring, than are left by that of the angel of true human sympathy.

Here is Christian work, too, that every Christian can do. In this kind of service we do not need money, or eloquence, or brilliant gifts, or a fine education: we need only to have in us the true spirit of Christ, a spirit of unselfish love, and then blessing will flow from our lives even without effort or purpose, unconsciously, as fragrance pours from a flower, as light streams from a lamp.

> "As some rare perfume in a vase of clay
> Pervades it with a fragrance not its own,
> So, when Thou dwellest in a mortal soul,
> All heaven's own sweetness seems around it thrown."

Christ did other kinds of work, but it was the same spirit that wrought in all his ministry. He taught the people; he scattered the words of truth; he lifted up his voice against wrong and sin; he sought the lost and led them back to the Father; he went to the cross in the room of sinners. In all forms of personal ministry we are to strive to follow in his steps. The golden seeds of heavenly truth which his lips dropped we are to seek to

scatter everywhere in life's desert-fields. The very best thing we can do for people in this world of sin and sorrow is to get the words of Christ into their hearts. It is like scattering flower-seeds on the black lava-beds about the fiery mountain's base: in the crevices the seeds will root and grow, and sweet flowers will bloom by and by. Christ's words are living seeds from which spring up heavenly plants to beautify and bless bleak and dreary lives over which sin's fires have rolled. The tiniest hand and the weakest can scatter these seeds in some bare spot where they will grow.

It is the little things that all of us can do in Christ's name that in the end leave the largest aggregate of blessing in the world. We need not wait to do great and conspicuous things. One Amazon is enough for a continent, but there is room for a million little rivulets and purling brooks. A life that every day gives its blessing to another and adds to the happiness of some fellow-being by only a word of kindness, or a thoughtful act, or a cheering look, or a hearty hand-grasp, does more for the world than he who but once in a lifetime does some great thing which fills a land with his praise. Nothing done for Christ is

lost. The smallest acts, the quietest words, the gentlest inspirations that touch human souls, leave their impress for eternity.

"Drop follows drop, and swells
With rain the sweeping river;
Word follows word, and tells
A truth that lives for ever.

"Flake follows flake, like sprites
Whose wings the winds dissever;
Thought follows thought, and lights
The realm of mind for ever.

"Beam follows beam, to cheer
The cloud a bolt would shiver;
Throb follows throb, and fear
Gives place to joy for ever.

"The drop, the flake, the beam,
Teach us a lesson ever;
The word, the thought, the dream,
Impress the soul for ever."

Then, while we are giving out blessings to help and to enrich other lives, we are receiving also into our own hearts. The words of the Master are literally true: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." The song we sing to cheer a weary

spirit echoes new cheer into our own soul. The sacrifice we make to help one in distress leaves us not poorer, but richer. Love's stores are not wasted by giving: the more we give, the more we have left. The way to grow rich in the treasures of kindness and affection is to show kindness and affection to all who need. If we find our spiritual life languishing, its resources growing small, the true way to refresh it is not by closer economy in giving out to others, but by greater generosity.

"For the heart grows rich in giving:
All its wealth is living grain;
Seeds which mildew in the garner,
Scattered, fill with gold the plain.

* * * * *

"Is the heart a living power?
Self-entwined, its strength sinks low:
It can only live in loving,
And by serving love will grow."

In every living church there are various organized forms of Christian activity; in some one or more of these every member should in some way be engaged. Let the young Christian at once choose the particular class of work to which he decides

to lend his hand, and promptly identify himself with the organization or society or band which has in view the special work he has selected. There should not be one idle Christian in any church. One of the most withering curses uttered in the Scriptures is against uselessness—against those who come not up to the help of the Lord against the mighty.

Thus Christian work is not only a duty, but a means of grace. It is not the rest of inaction to which Christ calls us, but the rest of loving service. Every power of our being we should give to him to be used. Every gift we possess should be employed in doing good. That day is a lost day in which we do nothing to bless some other life in the name of Christ.

"Work for some good, be it ever so slowly;
Cherish some flower, be it ever so lowly:
Labor! all labor, is noble and holy;
Let thy good deeds be a prayer to thy God."

VI.

HELPS: PERSONAL PRAYER.

WE all need helps in our Christian life. Of course, all the help we need we can find in God. His is the almighty arm on which we should ever lean in our weakness; his is the infinite life from whose fullness we should ever draw for the refilling of our own exhausted life-pitchers; his is the light that should ever shine upon our darkness for cheer, for comfort, for guidance, for joy. God is all we need.

But we cannot see God with these mortal eyes; we cannot feel his bosom when we need to lean upon it; we cannot hear his voice when we listen for the word he may have to speak; we cannot carry our empty pitchers up to heaven, where God dwells, to have them refilled. We are like vines torn off the trellis and trailing on the ground amid the dust and the weeds, and we cannot lift ourselves up to twine about the unseen supports

which God's grace provides. We need something to help our dull senses—something we can see or hear or touch; something to interpret to our souls and bring near to them the spiritual things of divine love; something to which the tendrils of our lives can cling, and which will lift them up and fasten them on the invisible realities of the spiritual world. And in loving mercy, and in condescension to our weakness and spiritual dullness, God has provided for us such helps as we need. He comes to us and brings us his blessings in ways that are adapted to our earthly state and capacity. He puts the rich supplies of his heavenly grace in cups from which we can drink, and sets them low down where we can reach them.

One of the helps which God has provided is *prayer*. Without prayer no Christian life can exist. There are other spiritual helps from the want of which we may suffer, but without which we may still live near to God; but to give up prayer is to die.

Why should we pray? Because God is our Father and we are his children. It would be a most undutiful, unfilial, ungrateful child that

should live in a good and beautiful home, enjoying its comforts, blessed by its love, and that should never have anything to say to the father whose heart and hand make the home, and who provides its comforts and pleasures.

We should pray, also, because we need things which we can get only by prayer. Some things we can pick up with our hands in this good world of our Father's, or buy with our money, or receive through our friends; but there are things which we can get only directly from God himself, and only by asking him for them. He alone can forgive our sins; and unless we are forgiven, life is not worth living. He alone can give us new hearts; and unless we have new hearts, we can never enter heaven. He alone can give us grace to live a good and holy life and keep us from sinking back into sin. He alone can show us how to live out the divine purpose of our existence. He alone can help us to fight life's battles and come out victorious at the end. He alone can lead us through Death's valley to glory. Indeed, we can do nothing without God. The leaf quivering on the bough is not more dependent upon the tree for its greenness and life than are we de-

pendent upon God for our very existence and for all blessings. We must pray or perish.

But *may* we pray? Is there any one to hear? We look up, and we see no face in the heavens, no eye gazing down—nothing but sky and clouds or stars. We speak and then listen, but no answer comes to us: all is silence about us. Is there really any one to hear? Or if there is, *will* he hear? There are a great many millions of people on the earth, and there are millions of other worlds besides this. Astronomers tell us that our globe, if it were suddenly destroyed, would not be more missed in God's vast universe than one leaf which you might pluck off a way-side bush would be missed from all the leaves on all the trees and forests of the earth. It may be that, like our planet, all these other countless worlds have their millions of inhabitants. Will God hear the cry of one person among so many? Does he take notice of individuals? Does he have particular thought and care for each one? The Bible plainly answers these questions. It tells us that God is our Father; that he loves us, not merely as a race, but as individuals—loves us each one with a peculiar personal affection, as

a human father loves each one of his children though he have many; that he thinks of us, giving to the smallest, humblest of us particular thought and care, watching over us, listening for our cry, ready always at any moment to give the help we need and seek.

A little child fancied that when she began to pray, God asked all the angels to stop singing and playing on their harps while he listened to her prayer until she said "Amen!" She was not far wrong in her fancy. God does not need to hush the angels' songs to hear a child's prayer, but he hears it, nevertheless, amid all the noises of this great universe, just as truly and clearly as if every other voice were hushed. One of the Psalms represents God as inclining his ear to the suppliant on the earth to hear his cry, as a man bends down so as to bring his ear close to one who speaks, that he may catch every word. In another psalm are these remarkable words: "He hath looked down from the height of his sanctuary: from heaven did the Lord behold the earth; to hear the groaning of the prisoner." The Bible is full of just such representations of God's interest in his children on the earth, and of his

loving attention when they cry to him. We may pray, therefore: there is One to hear us.

How shall we pray so as to be heard and to receive help? For one thing, there must be a real desire in our hearts. Forms of words do not make prayer: we must want something, and must realize our dependence upon God for it. Then we must come to him as his children. It was Christ himself who taught us to pray to "our Father who art in heaven." If we have the true child-spirit which the using of this invocation implies, we shall make our requests with confidence, believing that our Father loves us and will deny us nothing that is for our good.

Of course, we must remember that he knows better than we do what is best for us, and we must be willing, even when our desires are strongest and most impetuous, to say, "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done." We must let our Father decide whether the thing we ask is the thing we need. A father would not give his child a cup of poison though the child pleaded most earnestly for it, thinking it a cup of sweetness. The thing we want might be poison to our life; if so, God will not give it to us, but, instead, will give us

grace to do without it, which is an answer to our desire, and a far better answer than the thing we sought.

Prayer should also be earnest and importunate. Our Lord gave many lessons on praying, but there was no other point which he pressed so strongly as the necessity for importunity. Two of his parables were spoken to impress this duty. The poor widow got her plea, not because the unjust judge cared for the injustice she was suffering or wanted to do the right thing, but simply because she would not cease to plead with him. If an unjust man could be so moved by importunity, how much more will the loving heart of the heavenly Father yield to repeated supplication! The man at whose door at midnight the friend knocked gave the loaves, not because it was his friend who asked them, but because the friend would not go away without them. God is never moved by such low motives, but the parable is meant to show the power of persevering importunity in prayer. God wants to see his children in earnest. Languid, indolent praying does not please him: he loves to hear from suppliants the burning words which tell of intense desire. One fervent, impassioned "I will not let

thee go except thou bless me" has more power with God than whole years of cold, heartless, formal prayer.

Of course, importunity must not become rebelliousness: in the greatest intensity of our praying we must ever be ready to acquiesce in God's will. Importunity has its limits. It may at length become evident that God does not want to give us what we desire; then we should cease to plead, with submissive faith accepting our Father's refusal. Thus our Lord himself in the garden was importunate, but from first to last he deferred all to his Father's will; and after having prayed three times he ceased to plead, taking the cup held out to him. Paul was importunate in pleading for the removal of the thorn which so troubled him, but, like his Master, he also was acquiescent; and after pleading three times he too ceased to urge his plea.

There is little danger that we ever too earnestly or importunately press our desires for spiritual good, either for ourselves or for others. We know it is always God's will to give us more grace, to make us holier and purer, to bring out in us more clearly the features of the divine image, to give us more of his Holy Spirit: these

are always blessings; but when the desire refers to some physical trouble, or to the life of a friend, or to money, or to any of the interests of this earth, we need to watch lest the glory of God be forgotten in the intensity of our own shortsighted and worldly-biased wishes. In all prayer for temporal things it is far safer and wiser to ask humbly and with great diffidence, laying our desires at God's feet without anxious pressure, without too much urgency, and trustfully submitting all to his unerring wisdom. The true aim in living is not to grow rich in money, not to be clothed in worldly honor, not to have mere worldly happiness and freedom from suffering and loss, but rather to grow rich in spiritual graces, to be made more and more like Christ and to live out God's purpose and plan for our life. By far the noblest thing for us always is God's will. That means perfect beauty and perfect good. Anything else is marring and blemish.

When shall we pray? The young Christian is in danger of forming his religious habits too much by rules. Where the spirit of prayer is in the heart, there is little need to say just how or when prayer should be offered. Still, there must

be habits. Our human nature needs them to hold it faithful. Merely to trust to the feeling or desire, and to have no fixed time for devotion, praying only when the heart prompts, is not safe. The end would be a prayerless life. The lamps in the temple burned continually, but they were trimmed and refilled each morning and evening. The flame of devotion in a Christian heart should never go out, but this lamp too should be replenished at least each morning and evening. Certainly, there should be a season of secret prayer at the opening, and again at the close, of every day. "In the morning it seems a hem and border to each day's life, and in the evening it brings down the dew on the spirit, to wash off the stain and dust, and to feed and refresh." In the morning the day lies before us with its unforeseen and untried experiences. It may bring painful duty, or sore struggle, or hard task, or keen suffering, or sharp temptation, or perhaps death. How can we go out into the opening day which may have such experiences for us without seeking the guidance and help of God? In the evening we bring the day's history for review. There are sins to be forgiven; there is work to be blessed; there are

thanks to be spoken for mercies; there is weariness to be refreshed; there is hunger to be fed. Then, as we go into the darkness and defencelessness of the night, there is protection to be invoked, and new life for a new day.

We need to watch always that our prayers are real, fresh from our hearts, and that they never degenerate into mere formalities, words without desires, petitions without wishes and without faith. True prayer is talking to God as one talks to a friend; mere words are empty mockeries. We pray best in secret when we tell out our souls' deepest wants in the simplest phrases. As we grow in Christian life prayer becomes more and more real to us. Dr. Phelps says, "Three stages of growth are commonly discernible respecting prayer in the Christian consciousness. They are, prayer as a resource in emergencies, prayer as a habit at appointed times, and prayer as a *state* in which a believer lives at all times." In this last and highest development stated times of prayer are not abandoned, but the heart does not limit itself to these in communing with God. The spirit of devotion overflows the fixed hours of prayer and continuously holds fellowship with God

Even the busiest hours of work are brightened by many a moment of heavenly communion. This is what is meant by men walking with God. They talk to him while at their work in ejaculations of prayer. Thomas à Kempis says, "God alone is a thousand companions; he alone is a world of friends. That man never knew what it was to be familiar with God who complains of the want of friends while God is with him." It is this state of constant and unbroken communion with God toward which we should all strive. Let the life of the closet flow out into all the busy hours of the busiest days. It will be a defence for us amid temptations. It will give us power in Christian service. It will hallow all our influence. It will make holy and pure every nook and cranny of our lives. It will give us great peace in the midst of dangers. It will hold us apart from the world and near to God wherever we go. Like the beloved disciple, our habitual place will then be on the bosom of Jesus, and our earthly spirits will then become filled with the brightness and the sweetness of his love.

Thus prayer is indeed the Christian's very vital breath. To cease to pray is to cease to live. And

the gate of prayer is never shut. We should keep the path to it well trodden. We can there find help in all weakness, light in all darkness, comfort in all sorrow, companionship in all loneliness, friendship in all heart-hunger. If we know how to get help in prayer, we need never fail at any point in life; for then all God's might of love is ever back of our weakness, as the great ocean is back of the little bay.

VII.

HELPS: THE BIBLE.

ANOTHER indispensable help in Christian life is the Bible. In prayer, we talk to God; in the Bible, God speaks to us. The first disciples heard the words of divine truth as they dropped directly from the lips of the great Teacher. They could bring their questions right to him, and he would answer them. They could ask him what he wanted them to do, and he would tell them. When they were in sorrow, the words of comfort fell, warm and tender, from the very lips of the Son of God into their sad hearts. One of his friends sat at his feet and listened reverently and lovingly to his instructions; another leaned his head on the Lord's bosom and whispered his confidential questions and received answers; an inquirer came by night to him and had a long talk with him about the way to be saved. Those were wonderful days when God himself was on this

earth in human form, speaking in the actual tones of human speech the words of life and answering men's questions with his own lips. But that day is past. We cannot any more hear the divine voice as men heard it then. Yet God still speaks. We can still bring our questions, and he will answer them. We can still sit at the Teacher's feet and hear his words. We can still rest our heads on his bosom in our sorrow and listen to his assurances of love. We can still ask him how to be saved, and get a plain, clear answer. God now speaks to men in his written word.

The question is how to get help from the Bible. We know the help is there. Others find it, and we see their faces glow or the tears glisten in their eyes as they read its pages. But somehow it does not open to us as it does to others. We cannot say, "Oh how *love I* thy law! it is my meditation all the day." We try to make ourselves love the Bible and to find its words sweeter than honey and more precious than gold; but, to be perfectly honest, we do not love it, nor do we find in it either the honey or the gold. Yet we know the sweetness and the richness are there if we could only find them. How may we read the book so

that it will open to us and show us its wondrous treasures of light, of love, of comfort and of help?

For one thing, we must rid ourselves of all superstitious notions about the Bible. It is not a talisman. Merely having a Bible in one's possession or on one's person will neither drive away evil nor bring good. Soldiers entering battle sometimes throw away their cards and put their Bibles into their pockets: they imagine that then they will be safer in danger; but a Bible in a soldier's pocket is in itself no more protection than a pack of cards. Nor, if he has it in his pocket only, will it be of any more use to him if he is killed in battle. The mere owning of a Bible or having one in the house does no one any good. It will be just as well to wear a crucifix or to nail a horseshoe over the door. Let us get clear of all our superstitious impressions respecting the holy word.

We must remember, also, that the mere reading of a certain portion of the Bible every day will not make us wise unto salvation, nor purify our hearts, nor give us comfort in sorrow, nor put a staff into our hand to help us along life's rough, steep paths. The Bible does not yield its blessing

to such reading. The mere pronouncing of the words without even knowing what they mean or stopping to think or inquire is no better than for the Roman Catholic devotee to count her beads. Then, further, it is not enough to understand the words, or even to memorize them. There are many people who have great numbers of Bible texts at their tongues' end who never get any real help from them, nor make any practical use whatever of them. There are those who know the promises and can quote them to others, who are not able to apply one suitable promise to their own personal needs, and who get no benefit for their own lives from the texts they remember. Hiding the Bible in the memory is not all that is necessary to make its treasures of help availing.*

It may aid us here to inquire just what the

* The statements in this and the preceding paragraphs may to some seem too bald, but it is to be remembered that the words are written for young *Christians*, and not primarily for the unawakened. No doubt mere thoughtless memorizing of the sacred words of divine truth may at last bring to the latter class great blessing. The whole intention of these paragraphs is to emphasize in the strongest way possible the importance of understanding the word and allowing it to work its due effect in the heart and life.

office of the Bible is with reference to our personal life. There are many books that it is necessary merely to read: they have no office or errand to us beyond the pleasure or instruction which their pages may impart as we go over them Ordinary truths require no more than to be grasped or mentally accepted. They have no necessary bearing upon our personal living. No outcome of character is expected from them, save as all knowledge tends to broaden and enlarge the mind. We listen to a lecture on astronomy, and we hear many interesting things about the sun, the planets or the stars. We believe what we hear, and we may remember the facts; but it is not expected that the knowledge of these scientific truths will make any change in our conduct or character tomorrow. If we are in trouble, these truths will not comfort us. We cannot pillow our heads upon them in sorrow. If we are perplexed about duty, we shall not get any light from our treasure of astronomical facts: the stars are too far away and too cold. The same is true of all similar knowledge; our whole duty with regard to it is to receive it and to lay it up among our mental treasures.

But there is more than this to be done with the truths of the Bible. They are moral truths, and they are meant to affect our character and conduct. They are the words of God, and as such they are meant to be obeyed. They reveal to us invisible things—things no natural human eye can ever see—and we are to believe in these unseen things as eternal realities and to live with reference to them. Every truth in the Bible has some practical bearing upon life in some of its phases. The Bible is therefore a book for life, not merely for knoweldge.

An illustration or two will make this plain. The first word that comes to the inquirer is, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." It is not enough to know—even to understand—this word. It calls for an act—the committing of the sinful and ruined soul, utterly and for ever, for salvation, for life, for glory, into the hands of the only Redeemer and Saviour.—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart." It is easy to memorize these words, but that is not all we are expected to do with them. They have their proper outcome only when they draw out our heart's holiest affections and

fasten them upon God in loyal, consecrating devotion.—"This is my commandment, that ye love one another." The sentiment, men say, is admirable. It is extolled by many on whose hearts and lives it makes no impression whatever. No doubt the "sentiment" is very beautiful, but its true office is intensely practical—to kindle in all Christian hearts a wide, deep, generous, unselfish affection which shall bind and hold together all believers in a common and holy brotherhood.

It is very plain that to make proper use of such words as these we must not only know and understand them and admire them as ethical teachings, but must also submit our lives to them, to be influenced, moulded, colored and directed by their requirements—that is, we are to receive them as God's words of command to us and obey them accordingly. We are using the precepts and counsels of Scripture aright only when we are implicitly, unquestioningly and loyally walking in the way they mark out for our feet. The true outcome of the Bible as a book of commands is a holy personal life and a Christlike personal character. And the way to get help from the book is to come to it as to Christ himself, asking what he

would have us to do, and then, as we read, submitting our life to every word's requirement. Thus the Bible will become to us a personal guide—the voice of Christ, ever saying, "This is the way;" the hand of Christ, ever leading our feet in right and safe paths.

There is another class of Bible words—the promises. These do not so much call for active obedience as for implicit belief and restful trust. They contain positive assurances of divine help and blessing in certain circumstances. They tell us of things which we cannot see. Thus they call for the exercise of faith, and it is therefore harder to make them available than in the case of commands and precepts. Many who are faithful in performing every explicitly required duty fail to get such help from God's promises in the hours of darkness and trial as these promises are intended to give. It is not because they are ignorant of these divine pledges. They know them well; they can repeat and commend them to others in their need; they even speak of them publicly, in address or conversation, with exultation. But when in their own lives there come to them the experiences for which these divine prom-

ises were given, they derive from them no support or help. They find no everlasting arm to lean upon, no strong hand to hold them up, no lamp shining in the darkness, no strength reinforcing their weakness.

It is as if a ship should go to sea with a cargo of anchors in her hold, but when a storm arose should not have an anchor of her own ready for use. There are Christians whose memories are stored with Bible promises who yet, when trial comes, have not one blessed word which gives them any real help or comfort. They have tons of anchors, but none at hand to grip the rock and hold the vessel in the storm; piles of alpenstocks laid away, but not one in their hands to use in climbing dangerous paths; great clusters of lamps hanging from the ceiling of memory, but not one lighted to throw its beams on their darkness; life-preservers in abundance to look at while the ship moves on over quiet seas, but not one to be found and buckled on when the vessel strikes the rock and goes down in sight of shore.

How can Bible promises be made available in the times of need? How can we get from them that help which they are intended to give us in

living? We must recognize and accept them as the sure and faithful words of God—words that will be fulfilled to the letter in the experience of every child of God who rests upon them. They must be hidden in the heart and kept always ready for instant use. Then, when the need comes for which these promises make provision, they must be laid hold upon, personally appropriated and trusted in as God's fresh and explicit words of assurance to his loved ones.

It is, in fact, only in the experiences of real need that the value of the divine promises can be realized. One may greatly admire a lifeboat as he looks at it hanging in its place above the ship's deck on a fair morning, but its true worth he does not know until the ship is going down and the lifeboat is his only hope of rescue. It is so with Bible promises. We do not know their worth until we enter upon the experiences in which we are helpless without them. We may admire them when all is fair and calm about us, but it is only when the shock of the tempest is on us and our earthly trusts are shattered that we can realize the value of the trusts which have God's arm underneath them. It is only when our path

leads down into some dark gorge of trial where no earthly sunbeams fall that we learn the worth of the lamps of heavenly promise.

Thus the Bible is a book for life, and only when we submit our lives to it can we get its help. The hungry heart will always find the bread. The sincere and simple-hearted seeker after truth will always find the truth. The submissive spirit will receive guidance. The believing soul will find the arm of the Eternal under every word of promise.

As to the manner of reading the Bible, but few suggestions may here be given. The heart is the great matter: if the heart be right, God's Spirit will guide, and will not only open the beauties and the treasures of the Scripture and reveal its sweetness, but will also open the reader's eyes to behold the wondrous things that the sacred book contains. The Bible should certainly be read every day: our souls as well as our bodies need daily bread. It should be read, too, in connection with secret prayer: the two exercises mutually help each other. Devotion without the word to feed upon is inadequate for our souls' needs, and without prayer the Bible does not open to us nor yield the blessing

we seek. We should always keep the Bible lying open on the closet-table.

With regard to the method, the Bible may be read in course, or read by books, or read by topics, or read to meet the needs of the day, or read fragmentarily without order or plan. Some persons read the Bible through every year. Too many read without system or method of any kind, beginning wherever the book opens; and as a result they read certain portions many times over, but leave whole sections unread and unexplored. Every intelligent Christian should seek to become familiar with all parts of the Bible, and therefore it is well to read it through regularly in order. Besides this, however, it is well to read also by topics, searching all the volume through with concordance and text-book, to know what the Holy Spirit teaches on all sides and all phases of a particular subject. It is profitable, too, to read single books, if possible, at one sitting. This is especially helpful to the understanding of the Epistles. As experience ripens and the book becomes more familiar, it is pleasant and helpful to turn each day to passages that meet the peculiar needs of the day. Young Christians will usually find it

profitable to begin with the story of Christ in the Gospels, studying the life and words of the Master until their hearts are filled with thoughts and memories of Him whose life is their pattern and whose words are to guide their steps.

The present system of international Sabbath-school lessons affords an excellent opportunity for thorough and consecutive Bible study. In seven years the student is carried through the whole book. Of course many parts of it are not taken up in the lessons; but if the portions thus omitted between the Sabbath sections are carefully read each week, the entire Bible will be gone over in the seven years. The daily "home readings" indicated in connection with the lessons form in themselves an excellent Bible-reading course covering every day in the year. For most young people there is perhaps no better system of Scripture study than that which follows the order of the Sabbath-school course—the lessons, the home readings, the connecting portions and the references. If this is closely and conscientiously followed, day after day and year after year, it will in the end yield a full, intelligent and systematic knowledge of the word that makes wise unto salvation.

But, in whatever order the Bible is read, let it surely be read. There are now so many commentaries and other writings upon the Scriptures that we are in danger of reading a great deal *about* the Bible, while the book itself is neglected. It is important that we search the Scriptures themselves. Then each one should search for himself. It is not enough to take the golden findings that another has dug out: we must dig for ourselves. Above all, we must pray for light while we read, that we may discover the precious things that God has stored away in his word; and we must pray for submission, that we may be able to yield our lives to every influence of the truth; and we must pray for faith, that we may be able to realize the invisible things of God which the holy word reveals, and get their support and their blessing for our souls.

VIII.

HELPS: THE CHURCH AND ITS SERVICES.

BESIDES the help received in private devotion, every young Christian needs the aid which the public services of the Church are designed to afford. We were not made to live alone. We lean upon and cling to one another "like trailing flowers that grow by interlacing." The necessities of our being require companionship. It is so in all the phases of our life. A hermit is a contradiction of nature. Mind best grows and develops in contact with other minds. Socially, too, we need one another. And the same is also true in the religious life. In one sense God himself is all we need, and in communion with him every want of our souls is met.

"Yea, through life, death, through sorrow and through sinning,
He shall suffice me, for he hath sufficed."

Yet the glory is so great, the splendor is so dazzling, that we need human hands to bring the divine blessing down to us. Besides, the heart does not rise to its highest fervor in the solitude of the closet. Our warmest feelings of devotion are drawn out when we unite with others in associated service. The consciousness that a whole congregation of worshipers about us is moved by the same emotion that we experience, whether it be gratitude, confession of sin or prayer for mercy, deepens the emotion in us.

Then there are special promises to those who unite in the services of God's worship. In times of great defection particular mention was made by the prophet of those "who feared the Lord and spake often one to another." It was said that "the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him." Christ gave special promise of answer to prayer when his people shall agree in asking, implying that, as added strands make the cable stronger, so added hearts make the supplication more availing. He also gave a definite promise of his own presence where even two or three of his disciples shall meet together in his name.

There is no doubt that there are blessings which we can obtain in the public worship, where many hearts mingle their homage and their prayers, which we cannot find in secret. Private devotion is indispensable and cannot be replaced by the public services, yet, in addition to all the aid we can get in our religious life in secret prayer and Bible-reading, we need, and cannot afford to neglect, public worship. To do so is to deprive ourselves of one of the greatest helps in Christian life.

We can better understand the nature of the help we may receive from the church-services if we have definite conceptions of the objects of public worship.

One object is to honor God by bringing to him our hearts' homage. This element of worship is one that needs to be strongly emphasized, especially in non-liturgical churches. Many persons have the impression that the sermon is the most important—even the all-important—feature of the service. Too little is made of the devotional part. The error is a very grave one. There can be no doubt that in the divine intention the primary object in public religious service is to worship

God, to bring to him our hearts' love and adoration, our gratitude and our confession, and to renew before him our personal consecration.

Another object in the public service is instruction. The minister has been trained to be an expounder of the word of God. He has spent years in preparation for his work. He devotes the golden hours of every day to special study and thought, so as to be able each Sabbath to bring to his people and clearly and impressively put before them some important truth of Holy Scripture. Then the people come to the church to be instructed in things concerning God's character and will and concerning their own needs and duties.

A third object in the public service is spiritual growth and culture. We learn about God's character, that we may adore and worship him more fervently; about his will, that we may obey him more implicitly; about his promises, that we may trust him more confidently; about our duty, that we may do it more faithfully. The object of worship, also, so far as its influence upon ourselves is concerned, is the spiritual blessing and strength that come from communion with God

and the opening of our hearts in the warmth of his presence.

These public services are designed, therefore, and adapted to impart rich help to the sincere worshiper. The meeting with God is in itself an incalculable blessing. No one can spend an hour in God's presence, looking up into his face and occupied with thoughts of him to the exclusion of worldly thoughts, and not experience a cleansing of heart and a warming of soul which will prove a great enriching of the life. All that is good in us receives quickening and new impulse in such an atmosphere; all that is evil is checked and repressed. The influence of fellowship in worship with other Christians is also of great profit. We are lifted up on the tide of spiritual emotion. Our affections are purified. The bonds of Christian love are strengthened. There is the benefit, also, derived from the instruction in God's word which we receive. Now we are warned against some danger; now some sin in us is rebuked; now it is a word of comfort which comes to cheer us in sorrow; now it is a new thought about God, the unveiling to us of an attribute in his character, which draws out in us fresh adoration and love; now it

is a call to some neglected duty. Besides all these benefits, there is the personal renewal of spiritual strength which we find in the house of God: "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." Life wastes our vigor. Its duties and struggles exhaust us. The Sabbath services bring us again into communion with God, and the emptied pitchers are refilled. No one can spend an hour in God's house in true and sincere worship and not be better and stronger for it for many days.

How to get from the church-services the help they have to give to us is one of the most important practical questions in Christian life. No doubt there are rich possibilities of spiritual help in these public ordinances, if we know how to find the help.

It is quite possible to attend the church-services even with commendable regularity and yet receive but little spiritual profit. There is no holy atmosphere in the house of God, no heavenly ozone that is necessarily medicinal or tonic to our souls. There is no filtration of grace into our lives that goes on without agency of our own while we sit in our soft pews in the sanctuary with shut hearts

and dream through a service. Forms of worship, whether plain or elaborate, are empty without the sincere homage and faith of loving hearts. They carry up to God just what we put into them; they bring to us from God just what with prayer and faith we draw out of them.

Two persons may sit side by side and take part outwardly in the exercises of devotion, yet from one there will rise to God pure incense and an acceptable offering, and from the other the empty mockery of a heartless and formal service; the one worshiper goes away strengthened and blessed, and the other carries away nothing but an empty hand and a cold, unblest heart. Whatever the forms of public service may be, the heart must be truly engaged or the worship will be vain and unprofitable.

To make this chapter as helpful as possible to young Christians, a few definite practical suggestions are offered.

To begin with, thoughtful preparation for the church-services will greatly increase their profitableness to those who engage in them. The very best ordinary preparation is a season of private devotion before going to the house of God. The

heart is thus cleansed of its worldly thoughts, is opened and warmed toward God, and is in a suitable condition to enter sincerely and earnestly into the public worship.

A reverent approach toward and entrance into God's house are further aids to blessing in the services. We should at least remember that we are going to meet God, and should know and consider well on what errand we are going to meet him—to worship him and receive help for our own lives, if we have any real errand at all—and should have our expectations aroused in anticipation of the communion with God and his people which we are soon to enjoy, and our hearts eager with desire for the holy meeting. Many persons enter God's house with as little thoughtfulness and seriousness as if it were a concert or a literary entertainment they had come to hear. Such persons are not prepared either to render acceptable worship or to receive needed help in the service. We shall find in God's house and in his ordinances just what we are spiritually prepared to find. God must be in the heart, or we shall not see God in the exercises of worship. We shall never find in the sanctuary that which we do not seek and

want to find. If we enter careless and indifferent, with no spirit of devotion, we shall carry away no blessing. If we come with longing and earnest desire to meet God and lay our burdens at his feet, and rest and refresh ourselves in his presence, and receive new strength from him for duty, we shall find all we wish.

Another condition of help is earnest personal interest in each part of the service. There is no blessing in our being merely among true worshipers and in the presence of God. A throng was close around Christ one day, but one only of them all was healed; and she was healed because she reached out her trembling finger and in faith touched the hem of Christ's garment. The multitude thronged, but only one touched him. This history may be repeated any Sabbath in any congregation. While many crowd close around Christ, only those will receive blessing who touch the hem of his robe. Even in public services we do not worship in companies, but as individuals. One sitting close beside us may hold delightful communion with God and receive rich spiritual refreshment, while our own heart remains like a dry, parched field; in the midst of

the showers, yet receiving not one drop of rain from the full overhanging clouds. No matter what others may or may not do or receive, our business in God's house is personal. There is blessing there for us if we will take it. Suppose the minister *is* a little dull and the service a little wearisome; yet is not God present? And the blessing is not in the minister nor in the service, but in God himself, who is ready always to dispense to the tired and the hungry the rest and the bread they crave. Then, after the service, we should go away thoughtfully and reverently as we came. The custom which prevails in some churches of lingering a moment in silent prayer after the benediction is very beautiful and impressive. Let the last minute be spent looking into God's face for a parting benediction.

Church-aisle sociability, so often commended, no doubt has its pleasant side, but it certainly has its disadvantages and its grave dangers. We may without spiritual harm greet one another cordially and affectionately in quiet tones as we pass out, but too often the conversation runs either into criticism of the preacher and the sermon or off on trivial and worldly themes. The consequence is, that the

good seed sown is picked up and devoured by the birds before it has had time to root. We had better go away quietly pondering the great thoughts which the service has suggested to us, seeking to deepen in our hearts the impressions made and to assimilate in our lives the truths of God's word which have fallen upon our ears.

From the church-gate back again to the closet whence we set out is the best walk to take after the service has closed. A few moments of secret prayer will carry the blessings of the sanctuary so deep into our hearts that thereafter they will be part of our very life.

In the porch of the little parish church in England where Mr. Gladstone worships when he is at Hawarden Castle there is posted a notice containing counsels to church-worshipers which are worthy of being inscribed in the gateway of every Christian church. The following is a transcript:

"ON YOUR WAY TO CHURCH.

"On your way to the Lord's house be thoughtful, be silent; or say but little, and that little good. Speak not of other men's faults; think of your own, for you are going to ask forgiveness. Never

stay outside; go in at once: time spent inside should be precious.

"IN CHURCH.

"Kneel down very humbly and pray. Spend the time that remains in prayers; remember the awful Presence into which you have come. Do not look about to see who are coming in, nor for any other cause. It matters nothing to you what others are doing: attend to yourself. Fasten your thoughts firmly on the holy service; do not miss one word. This needs a severe struggle; you have no time for vain thoughts. The blessed Spirit will strengthen you if you persevere.

"AFTER CHURCH.

"Remain kneeling and pray. Be intent; speak to no one till you are outside. The church is God's house even when prayer is over. Be quiet and thoughtful as you go through the churchyard.

"ON YOUR WAY HOME.

"Be careful of your talk, or the world will soon slip back into your heart. Remember where you have been and what you have done. Resolve and try to live a better life."

A special word may fitly be spoken of the Lord's Supper and of the way in which we may get help from it. In the minds of many people a great deal of unnecessary mystery hangs about this ordinance. That which sets it apart from other services is that it is a memorial feast appointed by Christ himself in which our thought and faith are helped by visible elements which represent to us the great spiritual facts of our redemption. The help this service gives is not different from that received from other ordinances, unless it be that the use of the visible symbols brings Christ and his sacrificial work more vividly before our dull eyes than where words only are used to picture the same truths. In this sense it is a greater aid to faith than a sermon or a hymn; but, as in all worship, so in the communion: the blessing comes, not from the ordinance itself, but from Christ.

How, then, can we get from the Lord's Supper the help which it has to give? Only by finding the way to Christ and submitting our hearts to the tender influences of his love as exhibited in symbol in the external rite. The Supper is a memorial; we should remember Christ as we come to his Table. It is a memorial especially of our Lord's suffer-

ings and death: we should recall his humiliation, his obedience, his agonies, his crucifixion, and think of the love that led him voluntarily to make himself an offering for sin. But memories alone will not bless us: there must be appropriating faith. "Broken for *you*," said the Master; "Broken for *me*" should be Faith's answer.

There is much needless dread in many sensitive *Christian* hearts in approaching the Lord's Table. There is an impression that there is about this ordinance some peculiar sacredness which makes it perilous to engage in it without some special fitness which is not required for engaging in the other exercises of God's worship. This is a mistake. There should be in the heart of the sincere Christian no more dread in going to the Lord's Table than in going to any other service. St. Paul's word "*unworthily*"—which has been misunderstood by so many—has reference entirely to the *manner* in which persons observe the ordinance.

The Corinthians to whom he was writing made it a common feast, with reveling—even with drunkenness. Of course, any one who would observe it in that way, or any one who would sit at the table without loving Christ, without believing in him,

without truly worshiping him and submitting to him, or who should act irreverently or with levity, would be "guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." But in the apostle's word there is not the slightest allusion to those who feel themselves unworthy, yet who are sincere and true disciples of Christ. A sense of personal unworthiness is part of all true faith in Christ.

"Not worthy, Lord, to gather up the crumbs
With trembling hand that from thy table fall,
A weary, heavy-laden sinner comes
To plead thy promise and obey thy call."

If the heart be sincere, if the trust in Christ be true though trembling, and the obedience loyal though imperfect, we have the same right to come boldly to the Lord's Table as to prayer or any other ordinance. We can sin in any act of worship by formality, by insincerity, by levity, by want of heart, and we can sin in the same way in partaking of the Lord's Supper. We can sing a sacred hymn or listen to an earnest sermon or engage in the external form of prayer in such a way as to grieve Christ and harm our own souls.

There is no reason, therefore, for dread in com-

ing to the Lord's Table, any more than in engaging in any other sacred rite. We need to be sure only that we are truly in living union with Christ, that we are trusting him alone as our Saviour and following him faithfully as our Lord, and that we come to his Table with a sincere desire to meet him and to seek blessing from him.

The young Christian should never stay away from the Lord's Supper when it is celebrated in the church of which he is a member. If he is conscious of sin and failure, let him make humble confession and start anew. The Lord's Supper will help him to do this. We cannot afford to miss this ordinance. The weaker we are, and the more unworthy, the more do we need it. Besides, it is in a peculiar sense a Christ-confessing ordinance: we take our place at his table, and we thus witness to the world that we are his. His honor therefore demands that we should never absent ourselves when his people thus confess him.

There are other church-services which have their large possibilities of help for young Christians. Among these are weekly meetings for prayer. From Sabbath to Sabbath is a long stretch when the way is hard and the distractions are many, and

the battles sore. The prayer-meeting is a little oasis midway. It is a place specially for the refreshment of Christians. Every young disciple should put it down among his positive weekly engagements. We cannot afford to miss it if we are at all earnest in our desire to be strong and noble Christians.

The Sabbath-school is another of the church-services which no young Christian should miss. It is not for children only: it ought to be a Bible-school for the whole church, with its classes of young men and young women, and of old people with dim eyes and gray heads. It is on God's word that we all need to feed more and more. It will make us strong. It will lead us in right paths. It will beautify our character. It will put into our hand the sword of the Spirit for battle with temptation. It will prepare a pillow for our head in sickness and sorrow. It will at the last guide us through the valley of the shadow of death.

Thus it is that the church-services will help us. We all need them. We cannot neglect them and not suffer great harm and loss. Whenever the church-bell summons us to the house of God,

we should gladly respond. We should reverently enter the gates of the sanctuary. We should worship God in sincerity and in truth. We should come away thoughtfully and with prayer.

Then in the busy days that follow will come the proofs of the helpfulness and blessing that our lives have found in the services. The food that is eaten to-day is the strength of the laborer, the eloquence of the orator, the skill of the artisan, to-morrow. The spring sunshine and rain that fall upon the dry briery rose-bush reappear in due time in fragrant, lovely roses. And sincere and true worship in the quiet of the sanctuary will show itself in the beautified character, the sweetened spirit, the brightened hope, the truer, better living and the holier consecration of the days of toil and struggle that come after.

IX.

GROWING IN ONE'S PLACE: PROVIDENCE.

MANY people imagine that they could live very much better if their circumstances were different. In their failure to live a noble and worthy life they find comfort in laying the blame on some infelicity or hardness in their lot. This is really very foolish. For one thing, it does no good. Blaming circumstances will not change them. After all, they are *our* circumstances, and we must live out our life in the midst of them. Besides, God has in his providence put us just where we find ourselves, and unless we know better than he we must conclude that we are in the right place—at least, that it is quite possible for us to live a true Christian life where we are.

"Thou camst not to thy place by accident:
It is the very place God meant for thee;
And shouldst thou then small scope for action see,

Do not for this give room to discontent,
Nor let the time thou owest to God be spent
In idly dreaming how thou mightest be."

God does not merely choose for us the place where we can have the most pleasant time with the least friction and the fewest weights and encumbrances. Life on the earth is a school, and he puts us where we shall be trained the best. The easier place might be more comfortable, but the harder place does the more for us—makes the more out of us.

Some people think that if they could get away from others and live alone they would be better Christians. Men irritate them, tempt them, stir up the evil that is in them, excite them. But men do not grow best in solitude and apart from others. The goodness that is good only because there is no friction, no provocation, nothing to try it, is scarcely worth the having. Life needs life to school it and develop it. The old monks were wrong in their idea of Christian living when they supposed that they could reach a higher state of holiness by withdrawing from men and dwelling alone. God's plan is to set the solitary in families rather than to separate families into solitariness. We all need to

be sometimes alone. There should be hours when we enter into our closet and shut the door that we may look in upon our own hearts and hold communion with God, but the closet is not to be our abiding-place.

"Hark, hark! a voice amid the quiet intense!
It is thy duty waiting thee without.
Rise from thy knees in hope, the half of doubt;
A hand doth pull thee: it is Providence:
Open thy door straightway and get thee hence;
Go forth into the tumult and the shout;
Work, love, with workers, lovers, all about.
Of noise alone is born the inward sense
Of silence, and from action springs alone
The inward knowledge of true love and faith."

We all owe duties to others. To live only for one's self, though the aspiration be purely for holiness, is contrary to the spirit of true discipleship. Our duties to others are as manifold and as diversified as the varying phases and conditions of life's reciprocal relations. We are debtors to all men, far and near. God wants us on the earth to fulfill these duties. This is the way he wants us to serve him, not by pure devotion apart from human relationships. The men who in olden days

left society and fled to the cloister simply ran away from their chief mission. We are not left in this world after conversion merely to pray and praise: God wants us to be useful, to do his work, to run his errands, to help his needy, suffering ones, to train children for his service, to fight his battles.

"What are we set on earth for? Say to toil,
Nor seek to leave thy tending of the vines
For all the heat o' the day, till it declines
And death's mild curfew shall from work assoil.
God did anoint thee with his odorous oil
To wrestle, not to reign. . . .
So others shall
Take patience, labor, to their heart and hand
From thy hand and thy heart and thy brave cheer,
And God's grace fructify through thee to all.
The least flower with a brimming cup may stand
And share its dewdrop with another near."

But it is not alone for the sake of others that God has appointed us to live out our life among men rather than apart and alone: it is for our own sake as well. We grow best among other lives. It may seem to us that if we could get away from society we should escape many temptations and be able to live nearer to God. But we would then miss the blessing which comes from

struggle and victory. Heaven and its honors are for "him that overcometh." Not to enter the struggle is to fail of the white robe and palm of the victor. The best things in life are not found along flowery walks, but in the fields of conflict. There are qualities in us that can be developed only in struggle. To find easy places away from the strife of battle is to lose the discipline that makes grand character.

All relative duties are means of grace. The mediæval monk who fled from the world to escape its toils and cares in order to enjoy unbroken communion with God lost far more than he gained. He cultivated only one side of his nature, and that but imperfectly; for the two classes of duties—to God and to man—are so intertwined that neither can be performed while the other is neglected. We cannot love God and not love our fellow-men; we cannot serve God and not serve one another.

Sometimes we think that if we could get away from business cares and household burdens and social obligations we could be better Christians. It seems to us that these duties are not favorable to spiritual culture, and that we could be holier and could live more as Christ lived if we were freed from

their exacting and absorbing claims. But this is a mistake. It is in these very common duties that the powers of life are best developed. God puts the new life into our hearts, but we must work it out into strength and beauty. And there is no way to do this but by exercise. If we would develop the love of our hearts, we must love actual people; the sentiment must take practical form; the seed-germ must be cultivated; and for this no mere cloister-culture will do. If we would learn patience, there is no school but in experiences that require us to exercise patience. Christ said that rank among disciples is won by serving, that he who serves most is chief: we can gain this spiritual eminence only by filling our place in the midst of human needs and sufferings. The serving must be real serving of actual living people; no fine sentiment alone will exalt us. Good feelings and dispositions of whatever kind can become part of the fibre of life only when they are wrought out in actual experience. Spiritual graces cannot be cultivated in the abstract. Character is more than sentiment: it is sentiment incarnated, grown into life and strength and reality.

These simple illustrations show that, instead of being hindrances to the development of our Christian life and character, our relative duties are in the largest measure helpful. To tear ourselves out of our place among men in order to get rid of these duties is to leave whole fields of our nature uncultivated and many of the richest possibilities of our regenerated life undeveloped. The common duties that the daily round brings to our hand, although they may seem to be far from spiritual in their influence, and may seem to draw us off from communion with God by keeping us absorbed in and occupied with earthly tasks, are to us really not hindrances, but rich means of grace. We grow best Godward when we are serving best manward in Christ's name and for his sake.

Therefore, in the cultivation of the Christian life, we can do nothing better than attend with fidelity and diligence to the duties that belong to us in our varied relations. Wherever we find ourselves when we start as disciples, we should at once begin to meet the requirements of our place. The head of a family should take up promptly, as the first biddings of his new Master, his duties as a husband and as a father, performing them

with new faithfulness and tenderness and with the new motive in his heart of love to Christ. On becoming a Christian a child in the parents' home should accept as the heavenly "Father's business" for him at present his duties of obedience and honor to his earthly father and mother. And it should be a wonderful inspiration, if the home-limits seem too narrow for the aspirations of youth, to remember that for thirty years Jesus found scope enough, without chafing or discontent or the dwarfing of his powers, for his blessed divine-human life, in doing a child's simple part in a peasant-home. The will of God for brothers and sisters beginning to follow Christ is to render to one another all the sweet and helpful service of patient, unselfish love that belongs to their sacred relationship.

We are called to walk with God, but not ordinarily by withdrawing from among men. We are to walk with God in the place to which he has assigned us. We are called to be holy, but holiness is not some vague, nebulous thing, some abstract condition of soul attained apart from common practical life. Holiness is obedience to duty, and no one can be holy and neglect the service to his fellow-men which his relationships impose

upon him. God plants the trees in his orchards, and he knows where each will grow the best —in the quiet valley or on the bleak mountain; and where he has planted them they should grow in quiet contentment.

X.

PREPARATION FOR TRIAL: FORECAST.

TRIAL lies somewhere in every one's path. To the young it may seem far off, and even thinking of it may be unwelcome. "Why should we stain the blue of our skies," they ask, "with anticipations of trouble that may not come for years?" We are specially commanded by our Lord himself not to take anxious thought for any to-morrow. The true rule of a life of trust is to live by the day.

"Make a little fence of trust
Around to-day;
Fill the space with loving works,
And therein stay;
Look not through the sheltering bars
Upon to-morrow:
God will help thee bear what comes,
If joy or sorrow."

Yet there is a sense in which even in their happiest days the young should anticipate trial. The

man whose garners have been filled from this year's golden harvest should not be anxious about next year's bread, but he must forecast his wants by sowing in time to have another harvest. We need not sadden our days of joy by anticipations of future sorrow, but we ought, even in our sunniest hours, to be preparing for the times of gloom, so as to be in readiness for them when they come. We ought in our plenty-years to store away provision to feed upon in the famine-years that will follow. We ought in the glad springtime, amid plenty, to sow the seeds whose fruit we shall need in the dreary autumn. In the pleasant summer days, when we have no need for fuel, we ought to gather the wood which by and by we shall want for our winter fires.

The attendants went through the train at midday and lighted the lamps in the cars. It seemed a strange and quite useless thing to do, and many facetious remarks regarding it were made by the passengers. But soon the train rushed into a long, dark tunnel, and then the lighting of the lamps appeared no longer either a strange or a useless thing; nor was their pale light despised. It may seem idle and unnecessary now to the

young and joyous to hang up lamps of comfort in their hearts, while the sun of earthly blessing shines brightly upon them and while their path lies amid the flowers and through smiling valleys; but there are dark places farther on, unseen as yet —unsuspected even—into which they may plunge suddenly without time or opportunity to find the lamps of comfort and light them, and in which they will be left in utter darkness if they have made no provision in advance. But if, while they moved along in the brightness, they have wisely prepared for the dark passage, then the lamps will pour their grateful light about them and cheer the gloom.

There is a wide difference between being anxious about coming troubles and being prepared beforehand for troubles that may come. The former is a sin; the latter is a duty. Those only can truly live in quiet peace without anxiety who have already made preparation for anything that may come to them. No one can find real pleasure on the sea in the calmest weather who is not confident that the ship on which he rides is built and rigged for the fiercest tempest that may arise. No one can enjoy life in the fullest measure who is not prepared for

death. And no one can get the best out of joy and gladness who has not made provision for sorrow.

What preparation can we make in advance for trial? For one thing, there are certain great foundation-truths which, if firmly laid in our minds, will prove strong sources of comfort in any trial that may come. One is the Christian doctrine of providence. Take it, for example, as it is stated in our Shorter Catechism: "God's works of providence are, his most holy, wise and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures and all their actions." There is no chance in this universe; there are no accidents. God's government extends to "all his creatures and all their actions."

"Know well, my soul, God's hand controls
What'er thou fearest;
Round him in calmest music rolls
What'er thou hearest.
What to thee is shadow to him is day,
And the end he knoweth,
And not on a blind and aimless way
The spirit goeth."

Then He who governs all is not mere power: he is our Father with infinite love for us. He thinks

for us and plans for us. So personal and minute is his care that amid all the vast and complicated affairs of the universe not one of us is overlooked or forgotten, nor are the smallest interests of the least and humblest of us allowed to suffer. We are each so sheltered that no arrow that flieth by day nor pestilence that walketh in darkness can touch us. If we are God's true children, we know that whatever trouble comes to us comes as the Father's will. We know also that since it is the Father's will it must be the best thing for us. His unerring wisdom assures us that no mistake has been made in mixing the cup for us, while his infinite love is pledge that he seeks only our highest good.

The firm fixing in our minds of this great truth prepares us to receive without doubt or alarm whatever God may send, and sweetly and trustfully to submit to his will.

Preparation may also be made in times of joy and gladness for the days of trial by filling our hearts with the truths of the Holy Scriptures. The wise virgins were not left in darkness when their lamps had burned out, because they had a reserve of oil in their vessels. If we have a store of divine

promises and consolations hidden in our hearts during the sunny days, we shall never be left in darkness, however suddenly the shadow may fall upon us. Words of Scripture in which we have never before seen any special comfort will then shine out with bright lustre, like stars when the sun has gone down, pouring heavenly light into our souls. God will then speak to us in his own words, and we shall hear his voice of love and be cheered and strengthened by the assurances he gives. We shall find among the treasured comforts the very help we need—a staff to support us in the rough path, a lamp to lighten the bit of dark road, an arm to lean upon if we are weak and faint, a hand to guide if we do not know where to go, a word of hope if we are cast down, a bosom to rest upon if we are weary and crushed, a balm of healing if our hearts are wounded or broken. There is consolation in the Bible for every possible experience of sorrow; and if we but have the divine words laid up in our hearts, we shall find them as we need them, and they will sweeten our Marahs for us. They will come to our help at the right moment, and will prove God's very angels to us with their light and their help.

"When the sun withdraws his light,
Lo! the stars of God are there;
Present hosts unseen till night—
Matchless, countless, silent, fair.

"Children, oft when joy shines clear
Lost is hold of hope divine;
Then the night of grief draws near,
And God's countless comforts shine."

The same is true of preparation for meeting temptation. This is best made by storing the heart with the commands and promises of God's word, which may be brought out in the hour of need and made available for defence. When our Lord was tempted, he made use of the words of divine truth in resisting the tempter. If we would meet and overcome temptations, we must follow the example of our Master. But to do this we must have the Scripture words hidden in our hearts, ready for use in any moment of need or danger. Our Lord did not open his parchment roll at that moment and read the divine sentences which drove the tempter away. He had pondered the holy book in the quiet days before the enemy came, and had its words stored in his heart, ready for instant use when the hour of need came.

In Holman Hunt's picture "The Shadow of Death," which represents the Saviour as a young man in the carpenter's shop stretching himself at the close of a weary day, and with his outspread arms making the shadow of a cross on the wall, there is a minor feature that is full of suggestion. On a shelf is a collection of books in the form of rolls, such as were in use in those days. They represent the Saviour's library—the books of the Holy Scripture. They are there in the shop where he worked, intimating that in his leisure-moments he turned to them to ponder their great truths and store away their principles in his memory and in his heart. No doubt the picture truly represents the daily habit of his life in those quiet years when he was preparing for his great public work. Thus it was that when the tempter came there was no need for feverish haste in preparing for defence. The weapons were ready, and the victory was easy.

From the Saviour's example we should learn to prepare in advance for temptation by filling our hearts in the days of youth and early life with the truths of God's word. When the tempter comes, there will be no time to search out texts with which to ward off his blows; but if we have

the sacred words treasured in our hearts, it will be easy to draw them forth, as arrows from a quiver, for use at any moment of danger.

It need scarcely be said that another preparation for trial is a close walk with God in the days when the trial is yet in the future. Nothing adds more to the bitterness of any grief than the memory of a careless or a sinful life, while nothing alleviates the pain of affliction so much as the remembrance of faithfulness in duty and the consciousness of divine approval. If our habitual daily life has been near to God, we have no trouble in finding him when in some sore stress we greatly need him; but if we have been living far from God in the bright days, neglecting our devotions and our duties, it takes a long time, when trial comes, to get near enough to him to receive the tender personal comforts which he imparts to those who in intimate friendship lean upon his breast.

Our habitual treatment of our friends in the season of unbroken fellowship has very much to do with the comfort we shall get when we are called to mourn the loss of those friends. If we have been unkind or selfish or thoughtless or harsh; if we have failed in any duty to them; if we have

caused them pain or trouble; if we have wronged or injured them in any way,—no fullness and richness of divine comfort will altogether take away the pang from our heart when we stand by the cold clay and it is too late to ask or to receive forgiveness. But if we have been faithful and true to our friends in all ways; if we have been thoughtful and kind; if we have let our love flow out in fond expression and unselfish ministry, —when they leave us our sorrow at the loss may be no less sore, but it will have no bitterness in it. Loyal and tender friendship is a preparation for sorrow; its memory, a sweetener of bereavement.

To all of us sorrow will come in some form or other. But we may so lay up in store the resources of comfort that in whatever way it may come to us, in whatever measure or however suddenly, we may not be crushed by it, but may welcome it as God's angel and receive the message our Father sends to us in it, and the benediction it brings to us from heaven.

"Count each affliction, whether light or grave,
God's messenger sent down to thee.
Do thou
With courtesy receive him; rise and bow,

And ere his shadow cross thy threshold crave
Permission first his heavenly feet to lave.
Allow
No cloud of passion to usurp thy brow,
Or mar thy hospitality; no wave
Of mortal tumult to obliterate
The soul's Marmoreal calmness. Grief should be,
Like joy, majestic, equable, sedate,
Confirming, cleansing, raising, making free,
Strong to consume small troubles—to commend
Great thoughts, grave thoughts, thoughts lasting to the end."

In God's plan for each life one step is always designed to prepare for the next. One day's faithfulness lifts up to the next day's duty and fits for the next day's trial. Faithfulness—simple faithfulness—each hour, each moment, is all that is necessary to prepare for any future. Then, at the end, such a life will stand approved and complete, ready for the crowning, at the feet of Him who is Redeemer, Lord, Pattern, Helper and Friend.

THE END.

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